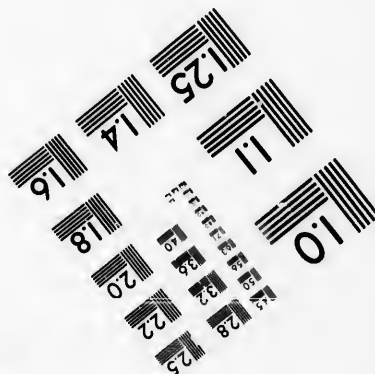
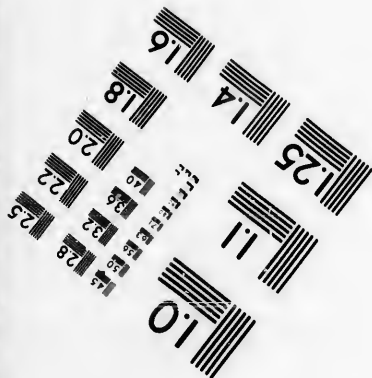
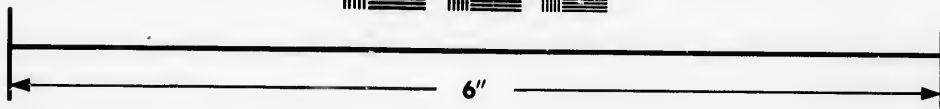
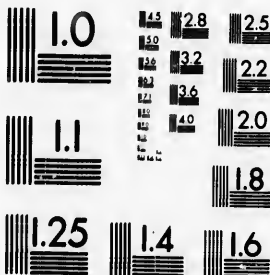


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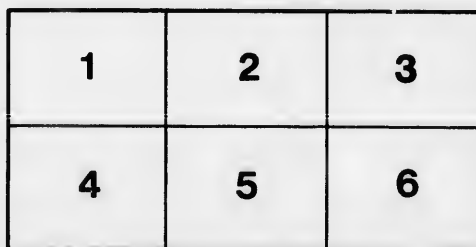
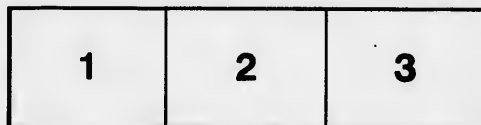
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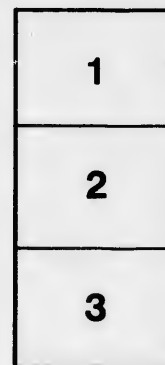
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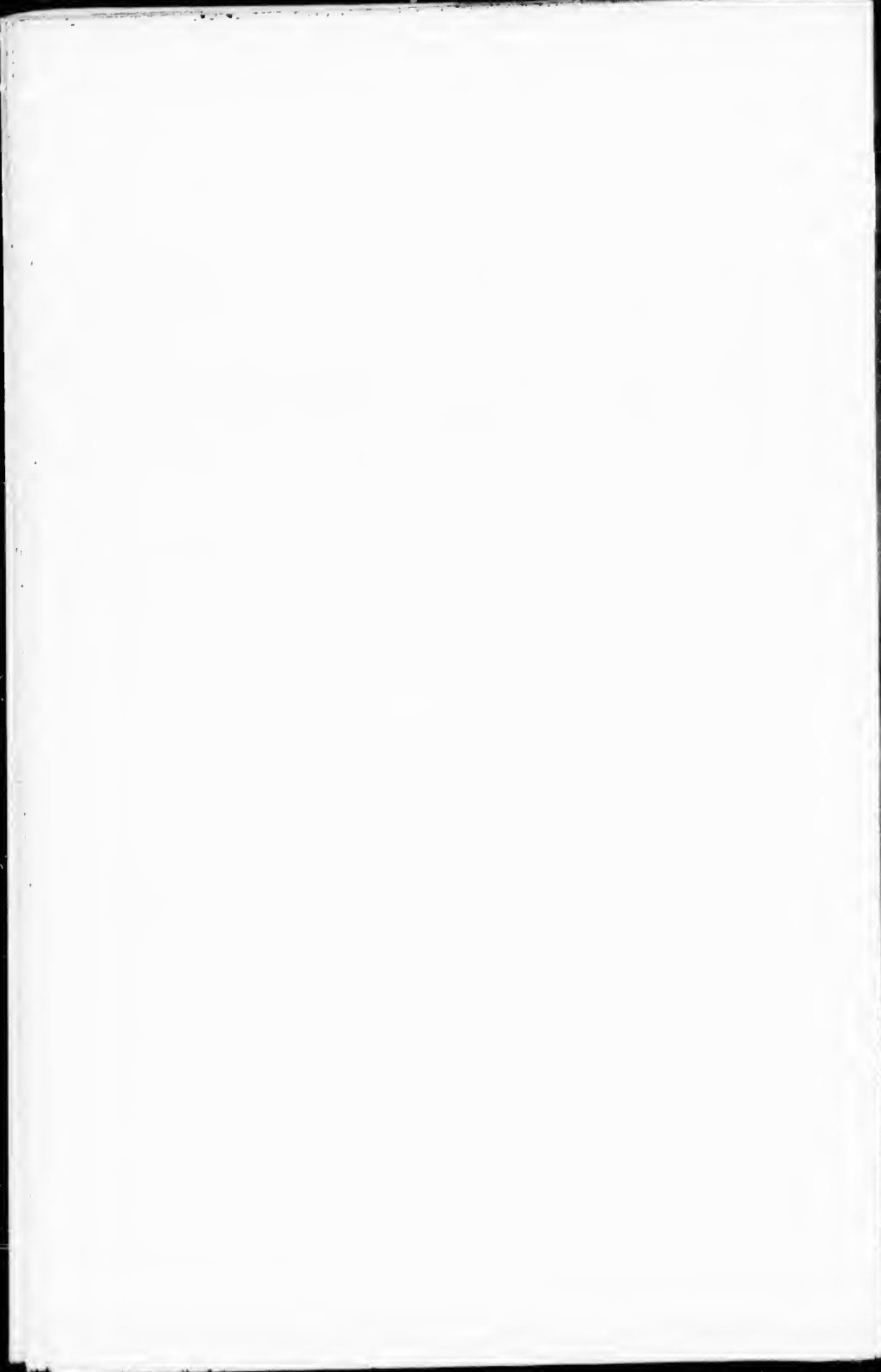
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THE GREATNESS AND THE HAPPINESS OF A
PEOPLE BRIEFLY CONSIDERED.

- A -

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN THE
SCOTCH CHURCH AT MONTREAL,

ON THE
21st OF APRIL LAST,

BEING

The Day appointed for a General Thanksgiving.

BY THE REV. JAMES SOMERVILLE.

MONTREAL:

PRINTED AT THE HERALD OFFICE,
BY W. GRAY.

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1814.

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THE GREATNESS AND THE HAPPINESS OF A PEOPLE
BRIEFLY CONSIDERED.

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN THE SCOTCH CHURCH AT MONTREAL,
ON THE 21ST OF APRIL 1813, BEING THE DAY AP-
POINTED FOR A GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

DEUT. XXXIII—29.

*Happy art thou O Israel! who is like unto thee, O
people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and
who is the sword of thy Excellency! and thine enemies
shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon
their high places.*

TO consider on what grounds the greatness
and the happiness of a nation must rest, and by what
means they are best secured, must be a Subject in the
highest degree interesting to every one who loves his

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country ; or who has even a proper regard for his own welfare. This subject is interesting at all times ; but in an especial manner at those periods, when every one who is disposed to attend to it, may learn a lesson from the events which have taken place.

If we look back to what has happened, within but a few years, we shall find, that in many cases, the wisdom of the wise seems to have become foolishness ; and that an overwhelming power, had threatened to set at defiance, all those calculations respecting human affairs, in which men had been wont to trust. It was a period of deceit, terror, and desolation.

In contemplating the awful phenomenon, the human mind seems to have lost its energy, and, in a kind of listless stupor, appeared to have concluded, that there were no means to be found to counteract the progress of the giant force.

At this important crisis, another power put itself in motion, wishing, if it had been possible, to attain to greatness, by lending its feeble help to banish freedom from the Earth ; and to destroy every thing which gives a value to human existence by making it dignified and respectable.

But, blessed be God, these times have passed away. The energies of the human mind have again been called forth from that state of torpor into which they had sunk, and those exertions which have been
made

made have been crowned with success.—The giant power has crumbled and mouldered away, and its feeble ally has only shewn how totally unfit it is for any purpose, but that of making itself contemptible.

When we consider all these matters, it must be seen in a very clear light, how becoming and proper it is in us this day, to have been called together for the purpose of devoutly and humbly offering up thanksgiving unto the Almighty Ruler of the Universe for that kindness which in the course of his Providence we have experienced.

But however proper it is in us to join our thanksgiving to those of other nations, who, like ourselves have been saved from the cruelty of the oppressor; I think it may be better, in the mean time, to turn our thoughts to those blessings, which as a people and a nation we ourselves enjoy; so that from knowing on what grounds the greatness and the happiness of a people must rest; and by what means they are preserved and upheld, each of us in our several situations and places may be disposed to attend carefully to those duties which are required of us,

Always remembering that our trust should at all times be placed in the protection of a kind providence; never let us lose sight of those means by which that protection will be insured to us. Let us always keep in view those means which God has promised to

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bless;

bles; in order that we may never be guilty of the folly of neglecting them, and yet hope to meet with success.

In giving you my thoughts, respecting the greatness and the happiness of a people, I shall merely direct your attention to a few of those particulars, which appear to constitute the greatness and the happiness of that nation of which we form a part.

But before I proceed, I deem it necessary to caution you against a mistake, as pernicious as it is common. I mean, that of being carried away with theory and speculation, instead of attending to what is the real and true statement of the matter. By this I wish you clearly to understand, that if it shall appear, upon just enquiry, that the people of which we form a part, are in the practical and actual enjoyment of blessings to which all other nations have been strangers; or which they have not enjoyed in an equal degree; then we are bound by every just and proper principle to be thankful, and to do every thing in our power for the preserving of the peace, good order, and harmony of that society of which we form a part.

In speaking of the greatness and happiness of that nation to which we belong, I shall place, as the basis of that greatness and happiness, the spirit of the people at large. By the people, I mean the whole
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inhabitants of the country, and not any particular class of them : though I am aware that the word has been used in a different sense ; to give a certain class of people a degree of artificial importance of which they would have never thought, had it not been instilled into them by persons, of whose designs, those called the people, were not aware.

By the spirit of the people at large, I mean that sense of independence, and correctness of thinking, of which that nation I am speaking of, has been allowed to possess a very large portion. This is the Spirit which is hated and envied by every Despot ; though it will be cherished by the Monarch of a free people, as the brightest jewel in his crown.—This spirit is the source of every noble and manly feeling ; it is generous, brave, and undaunted. No highness of rank, no greatness of wealth, will secure the vicious and unprincipled from its censure and punishment ; while, at the same time, the man devoid of rank and wealth cannot be oppressed with impunity.

When such is the value and importance of this spirit, let us consider by what means it is excited, cherished, and preserved.

In the first place, it is excited by that education which the youth of that nation very generally receive. It is thus, that the sparks of Independence and personal dignity are excited ; and the foundation

tion is thus laid, upon which the future character is formed. The youth are thus taught, and they also find in their actual experience, that there is no protection afforded for meanness, baseness, or deceit:—that they must act their part well, or nothing can save them from that contempt and disgrace which they have brought upon themselves.

In addition to this, the youth very generally become acquainted with the truths of the Christian religion, which have a much greater influence upon the mind than the generality of people are aware of. It is true, that the education a man may have received, may not, in every case, be supposed to have been of much use to him in forming his character, or in leading him on to eminence and distinction: but we ought to consider, that when such have been the principal means of forming the character of so many who have acted a distinguished part in society, that they should never be deemed of little importance.

In the second place, the spirit of the people is preserved by that political constitution under which they live. They feel that they are protected; and that every one has a personal respectability suited to his situation in life, of which nothing but his own misconduct can deprive him. It is this which stirs up every one who understands his duty to exert himself well; for he is sure of the reward of his labour, and that in the use of proper means no one is allowed

to interfere with his exertions. Hence the many instances which we find of people who began life under the most unfavorable circumstances, rising by degrees to great eminence and respectability, and also becoming distinguished and useful members of society.

While such examples excite the emulation of the well disposed youth, and stimulate their exertions, they also shew them the necessity of using only those means which are commendable and proper, otherwise they are sure to fail in any wish they may have entertained, to become respectable and useful members of society.

When speaking of the political constitution of that people of which we form a part, let it be distinctly attended to; that the stability of that constitution appears to depend in a great measure, on that high minded and noble body which form a part of the national legislature. They are placed in that happy state of independence, which is neither to be awed by superior power; nor induced to act rashly or foolishly by idle clamour or artificial commotion. To be convinced that what I have now stated is true, look only at the exertions which those men have made both at home and abroad for the welfare of their country.

In addition to this, there are so many men who are possessed of sound wisdom and independence of spirit, who watch over the welfare of the nation at large ;

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that

that there is little occasion for apprehending, that any real evil which can be removed, will pass unnoticed for any great length of time. The perseverance with which the abolition of a traffic in human beings has been followed up, will shew clearly the truth of what I have now said.

In the third place the spirit of the people is preserved by the independence, the purity, and the dignity of our Courts of Justice. This is one of the first blessings which a nation can possess.

In every nation in which Justice is not respected and enforced, the people soon degenerate and become swindlers and cheats, murderers and assassins.—The history of all the nations of the earth proves, that what I have now stated is strictly correct. How necessary is it then, to have the means of curbing and keeping in order, the selfish and unruly passions of mankind.

The welfare of a nation can neither be promoted nor preserved, without the impartial distribution of Justice: and Justice cannot be impartially distributed; unless the Judges are independent. They must not be afraid of the face of man — They must therefore feel themselves perfectly independent and secure, unless from malversation in their office; and this malversation must be so evident, as to admit of no doubt.

If

If a Judge feel himself so insecure that his official character may be tarnished by idle clamour, or by noisy declamation, how is it possible that that man can cause Justice to be respected; or how can he give his decisions with that firmness with which they should be given?—In that nation to which we belong therefore, the Courts of Justice are as pure, as perhaps it is possible for human institutions to become. This has been effected by making the Judges independent.—In such circumstances the only motive a Judge can feel, is to discharge the duties of his office well. Indeed every man whose business it is to speak the truth should be so independent, as will enable him to act with due spirit and firmness.

To see the truth of what I now say of our Courts of Justice, let any man possessed of ordinary candour attend to the minuteness with which evidence is investigated in the course of a trial; and he will thus be forced to confess, that it shews in a true point of view the dignity to which the human character may attain.

In the fourth place the spirit of the people is preserved by the freedom of the Press.—This is a most powerful mean for diffusing information amongst a people. It is true the information which may be diffused in this manner may be false, and the most pernicious errors may be thus inculcated.—But, my friends, if we are to reject what is really good in itself, because

cause it may occasionally be the means of exciting trouble and difficulty, I am afraid there are very few blessings that we shall not be obliged to relinquish for the same reason.—Men in their usual intercourse with each other often deal in falsehood; they make professions of friendship where they mean nothing, and at the very moment they may be most keenly pursuing their own selfish views, they may be trying to make you believe, that it is your interest only which they wish to promote.—But though such abuses prevail in society, surely that circumstance does not prove, that men should not associate with each other, or that they should separate and become solitary individuals. In like manner might we argue with regard to health, or the possession of riches. Health has very often been applied to a bad use; but still it is considered as a most valuable possession. Riches have also been very often employed to promote the worst of purposes; yet riches are deemed, and that properly, a very desirable object.

When therefore, we allow that an important and useful privilege may be and often is, made use of in a very improper manner, never let us lose sight of the real value of the Privilege in itself. When we wish to get rid of any difficulty or inconvenience; never let us forget this circumstance, that, if we use improper means for accomplishing what we have in view, we shall thereby in all probability introduce something which will be a great deal worse, than that of which

we are

now complaining —The advocates for innovation, of whatever party they may be, should never allow themselves to become indifferent as to the nature of the means they make use of to attain the end they have in view.—If you make use of improper and unjust means to obtain an object which in itself is desirable and highly commendable, you thereby set an example to those who may possess less principle, but more cunning ; to make use of the same kind of means to obtain an end, which ought to be execrated and detested.

Besides, in all free governments, commotions, and turbulence will occasionally take place.—But it is surely better to be liable to this ; this open and avowed evil, than to tremble in secret, lest the dagger of the assassin may deprive you of life ; or lest you may be dragged to the dungeon alike unpitied and alike disregarded.—The best security is, for every one to know his duty and to be at all times disposed to attend to it, with firmness and fidelity.

In the fifth place, the spirit of the people is preserved and cherished by that decency of manners which prevails, and also by those morals which are not only countenanced but also practised. When decency of manners prevails it must be owing to this ; that every person who acts contrary to decency, is sure to be censured and punished.

To shew you how very highly this sentiment is felt and acted upon by that people of whom we form a part, you have only to attend to what takes place even amongst the lowest in point of rank and fortune, when any one has the effrontery to outrage that sentiment of which I have been speaking. You will thus see, that those people even the lowest in society, have a much higher and more correct sentiment of propriety and decency of conduct; than the far-famed Greeks, or the renowned Romans, ever possessed at any period of their history.

It is of the utmost importance that right thinking should be diffused through the people at large: and that they should have a high sense of what is proper and becoming. Unless this is attended to, a people are in the high road to ruin and destruction.—It is true what I now recommend may sometimes be the means of raising trouble and difficulties. But these troubles and difficulties, when met with calmness and decision soon pass away; and those very people who have been misled, will afterwards, when they discover their error, be the firmest support of those very measures of which they had disapproved.—A storm of thunder and lightning is grand and awful, and sometimes may be destructive; but generally, it balances the clouds, purifies the air, and is the harbinger of fair weather, and fruitful fields.

I added, that the morals of the people at large were

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were also good. The morals of a people must be good when vice is obliged at least, to conceal itself; when it is not countenanced nor attempted to be justified.

When we think of the manners of ancient times when vices, not even to be named amongst us were openly and publicly committed even by their greatest and their supposed wisest men; what great reason have we to be thankful; that we have been preserved from such foul contagion.

But the good morals of a people are shewn in the way in which men act when placed in the most trying circumstances. When an ancient Roman found himself placed in disagreeable circumstances, he thought he performed a noble exploit by putting himself to death: and this cowardly action was gravely spoken of as a heroic deed, as something great and praise worthy. So do not those act who have learned, what is taught them in the Christian religion. It is true that in the madness of passion, many instances there are of this crime amongst the people of which we have been speaking, but still it has not been commonly considered as any proof either of wisdom, or of real courage.

To see the manner in which the courage of the nation to which we belong has been displayed, I shall not desire you to turn your attention to those fields where hosts encounter hosts; and where the soldier calmly

calmly and firmly steps into that breach where he knows that certain death awaits him : I will rather conduct you to that scene, in which true heroism and fortitude exist in their most perfect state. The scene I wish to set before you is that of a vessel gradually sinking in the waves : destruction is inevitable, yet no man leaves his post : To the solicitations of the thoughtless, that they might be allowed to render themselves insensible previous to death ; alledging as a reason, that such a mode of acting could make no difference ; the answer was calm, yet decided ; " Let us die like men and not like brute beasts. "* This conduct speaks for itself, and it cannot be rendered more striking by any comment.

I shall only farther add in the sixth place, that the spirit of the people is preserved by those benevolent and charitable institutions for which as a nation they are so famed. There is no country where such provision is made not only for the employment of the poor ; but also for their support, when they are unemployed or in distress :—And of all the people who have ever lived on the face of the earth ; none are so alive to the call of humanity, from whatever quarter, as they are. The wealth of the nation enables them to be thus liberal and charitable, but I would not wish to consider wealth as really contributing to the strength of a nation, without the other circumstances which

* See account of the loss of the Abergavenny.—*Naval Chronicle* for 1805.

which I have mentioned : For a people who have no other dependence, but their wealth, will not long be possessed of that wealth in which they have thus trusted. But, when along with wealth they possess that spirit of which I have been speaking, (which is pre-eminently the case, with the nation to which we belong,) it is then that their wealth is most likely to be applied to those purposes, which will cherish and support the true greatness and happiness of a people.

I have thus given you my thoughts on what constitutes the greatness and happiness of a nation ; and I have said, it consists in the spirit of the people at large ; that this spirit is preserved and cherished in the nation to which we belong ; by the nature of the education which the youth receive ; by the political constitution under which they live ; by the independence, the purity, and the dignity, of the courts of justice ; by the freedom of the press ; by that decency of manners which prevails ; and also, by the morals which are really countenanced and practised ; and lastly, by benevolent and charitable institutions.

Allow me now, before I conclude to recommend it unto you to acustom yourselves to think and reflect, before that you give any opinion as to the circumstances in which you may be actually placed.

Whoever expects to pass through the world without trouble, does not understand his real interest ; and whoever wishes to obtain for himself individually, a security from evil which is not to be found any where on earth ; will in due time discover, that he

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has been amusing himself with a dream, and that he must awake to vexation and disappointment.

Study to acquire a calm, contented disposition. I do not mean that you should become careless or indifferent, or that you should wish to be idle. I mean the direct contrary, that you should be well employed at all times; for to be well employed is the basis of human happiness.

Guard against envy, and the whole tribe of the mean and low passions. Be at all times the steady friends of peace and good order in society; and avoid as you would your bitterest enemy, all those who are continually complaining of what is taking place.

Recollect, that you have already been tried with alarms; and that you may again be tried in the same manner. Act as you have hitherto done, and these alarms will pass away.

Trust in the protection of a wise and good Providence; and be at all times disposed to attend carefully to those duties, which are required at your hands.

Remember, that the blessings of life can neither be acquired nor preserved, without diligence, watchfulness, and exertion. If you understand this doctrine aright, long shall you have reason to say—
 “Happy art thou O Israel! who is like unto thee;
 “O people, saved by the Lord; the shield of thy
 “help, and who is the sword of thy Excellency;
 “and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee,
 “and thou shalt tread upon their high places.”—Amen.

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